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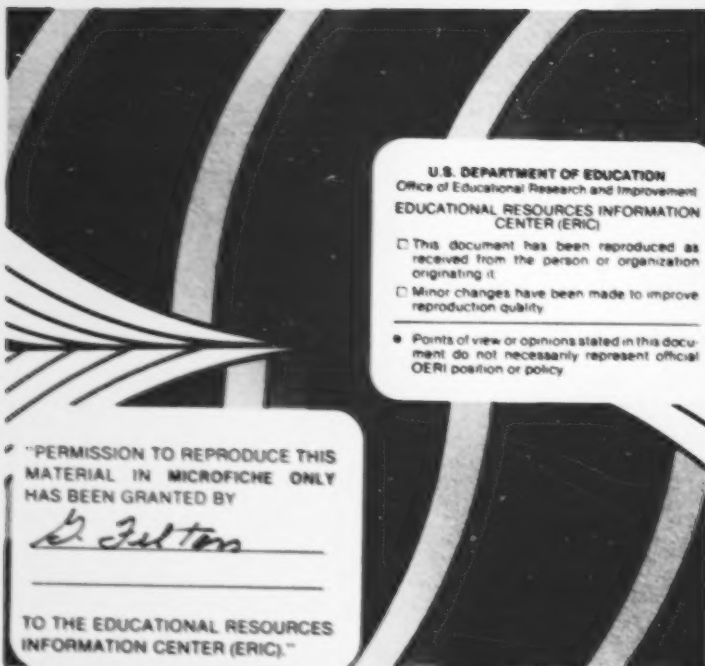
This monograph explores three particular emphases: (1) stress occurs within an ecological system; (2) individuals need to be skilled self-managers in dealing with their stress ecology, and (3) teachers are the initial source and ultimate controller of their stress system. Integrated with these emphases are such topics as the ecology of teacher stress, teachers as sources of stress, stress as motivation for growth, symptoms and indicators of burnout, knowing stress management, and the role of professional growth in stress prevention/resolution. (JD)

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Stress and Teaching

by Kevin J. Swick



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What Research Says to the Teacher

Stress and Teaching

by Kevin J. Swick

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INTRODUCTION

This monologue replaces the previous editions of *Stress and the Classroom Teacher*. Not only does *Stress and Teaching* have a new title but, more importantly, it contains more recent perspectives on stress and teaching. It also provides a more comprehensive look at the role of teachers in preventing and managing stress. Research since 1985 has set a framework for involving people in better stress management experiences.

The monologue explores three particular emphases: (1) stress occurs within an ecological system, (2) individuals need to be skilled self-managers in dealing with their stress ecology, and (3) teachers are the initial source and ultimate controller of their stress system. Integrated with these emphases are such topics as the ecology of teacher stress, teachers as sources of stress, stress as motivation for growth, symptoms and indicators of burnout, knowing stress management, and the role of professional growth in stress prevention/resolution.

Throughout the following pages, teachers are encouraged to define their specific stress context, to study it, and to make plans to refine and improve it. Elements of stress prevention given special attention include the analysis of the classroom and school environment, assessment of the teacher's stress status, and an exploration of some useful stress management ideas. The intent of this monologue, like that of earlier editions of *Stress and the Classroom Teacher*, is to help teachers better understand the sources of stress and to acquaint them with the skills they need to manage it effectively.

THE MEANING OF STRESS

What is stress and what does it mean? Of even more consequence—why is stress so pertinent to the teaching process? In itself, stress is neither good nor bad; it depends upon the results of an individual's perceptions and behaviors (67).^{*} It is defined by a

^{*}Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Bibliography beginning on page 29.

person's affective reactions to a specific situation or series of related events. In addition, the history of the person's stress response has much to do with his or her way of dealing with stress. An event that may be stress-producing for one person may be seen as a challenge by another (35).

There are many views of the meaning of stress. According to Selye's classic definition, stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demands (56). In other words, stress is an integral part of growth and development. Only when it becomes a predominantly negative factor in a person's life (eroding the abilities to function) does it take on destructive meaning (14). It is also important to note the two different forms stress takes: *acute* and *chronic* (56). Acute stressors are usually short-term but intense in that they disrupt the equilibrium sharply. In most cases, however, these stressors are "real" and people can and do act to resolve them. Chronic stress is long-term, intense, and pervades the person's life space. It is often more imaginary than real, although in some cases reality is distorted to foster more stress. While both forms may be damaging, acute stressors are usually handled in a viable way; chronic stress appears to debilitate the individual.

Stress has also been delineated by what it does to people: physiological damage, psychological harm, social disruption, and/or cognitive disorientation (67). In addition, some researchers emphasize its environmental aspects—particularly those factors at work or in the immediate social group (65). Finally, recent studies exploring the cumulative nature of stress have centered on "role-stress." Apparently, specific roles like that of the teacher are more "charged with stress potential" and need to be recognized as such. Personality research is now examining the dynamics of person-role-events as they relate to stress (38, 45).

It is obvious, then, that no single definition of stress can capture its evolving meanings. For our purposes, however, stress is explicated as a process that carries both positive and negative potential as determined by the individual's perceptual and behavioral orientation.

THE ECOLOGY OF TEACHER STRESS

Teacher stress is a part of a broader system of stress that has become prevalent in all schools. Changes in the way schools function and in the people they serve have assured that the teaching process will have certain amounts of stress. School reform, new family structures, and changing teacher roles are some of the major elements of stress today. Of course, teachers also experience personal stressors in their lives: financial, family, marital, and developmental changes (15).

At the center of the stress ecology is the person. Of all the premises that researchers agree upon, the personal-subjective nature of stress is clearly a matter of consensus. Individuals learn and refine their stress orientation throughout their lives. For example, young children who experience too much stress too soon are at risk of having a very low tolerance for change in adulthood (34). In addition, biosocial factors certainly influence how a person defines and reacts to stress (9). Poor nutrition, passive living styles, inadequate exercise, and poor mental health habits tend to interact and create stressful conditions within the individual.

The Need for Self-Evaluation

The largest single factor in teacher stress is a *lack of personal efficacy* (48). Kerr suggests that a teacher's ability to differentiate the "self" in terms of both personal identity (value and worth) and professional identity (skills and growth) is the best resource for dealing with various sources of stress (35). Certainly, even effective teachers experience stress. However, their ability to use the self in problem solving will increase their potential for accurately assessing stress sources. For that reason, one aspect of teacher stress assessment involves self-evaluation of current mental health, job satisfaction, skills and experiences in dealing with change, personal and family relationships, and professional growth status (17). Also critical to teachers' analysis of their stress situations is the accurate imaging of the self as the possible stressor. Langer's work clearly shows that a great deal of stress results from poor self-management skills. In other words, the more skilled teachers are in managing their lives, the less likely they will be to suffer from chronic stress (39).

Two examples highlight the "teacher-as-stress-source":

Mr. Mitchel has experienced consistent discipline problems since he began teaching two years ago. He blames it on the sixth grade students. Because they are the lower group, he claims, what can be expected of them? Naturally, the students sense his negative attitude toward them, and as the year proceeds their behavior becomes more stressful to the teacher. Is the source of stress the students or Mr. Mitchel's attitude or possibly a combination of both factors?

Mrs. Williams, a former third grade teacher, is teaching kindergarten for the first time. She notices her patience wearing thin as the kindergartners are very active and not at all like third graders. Her eating, sleeping, and social habits have become disjointed. Is her stress due to the change to kindergarten or ...?

Only these two teachers can ultimately answer the question about their sources of stress. Research clearly supports their close study of themselves as participants in the stress-making process (14, 59).

The remainder of this section discusses specific ecological stressors that teachers encounter in the classroom, in the school, and in their personal and professional lives.

Ecological Stress

Ecological stress refers to potential stressors integral to specific environments (65). According to current thinking, particular environments have high, average, or low stress potential. Of course, the individual's stress orientation must be calculated into any assessment of stress dynamics. Further, there is no clear direction on the effects of particular ecologies on stress (37). Given these cautionary notes, research suggests some patterns are emerging with respect to ecological stress.

While not conclusive, there is evidence that individuals functioning in environments where large numbers of daily irritations exist are prone to more stress-related behaviors (45). Teachers function in such contexts and are therefore susceptible to an accumulation of "small-event stressors" (77). Consider Mrs. Raja's experiences:

She arrived at school to find that needed materials for class were not ready—the xerox machine had broken down. Later, her aide called to say she would not be in because of her son's illness. Even later, the principal stopped by to remind her about an emergency meeting after school.

Any single annoyance is understandable, but as teachers know, "small-event stressors" are inherent in the intense atmosphere of teaching and learning.

A hidden source of teacher stress, then, may be exposure to a multitude of small but ongoing stressors. Some specific small-event stressors identified by teachers are constant interruptions, excessive paper work, daily management tasks, and continuing shortages of needed training materials (77). There are also what Sparks calls "job-related stressors" (61). The dynamics for high stress is established when job demands are extreme and control of these events is low. Obviously, teachers work in such an environment.

Classroom Stress

Ecological stress in relation to teaching occurs within three contexts: the classroom, the school, and the professional arena (66). *Classroom stressors* vary depending upon teacher assignment. Some of the more common ones include classrooms that are too small, large numbers of students, lack of adequate instructional materials, poor classroom facilities, and inadequate working space (20). In isolation, one of these stressors is usually manageable; the existence of several of them creates an erosion of teacher integrity (25).

School-Related Stress

School-related stressors act as an umbrella over the teaching-learning process. Process stressors may include poor psychological climate, ineffective leadership, and inadequate support resources at the building level. Event stressors most often mentioned by teachers are scheduling conflicts, constant interruptions of classroom teaching, excessive paperwork, lack of support from administrators, and excessive work demands (67). Certainly there are legitimate reasons for schedule changes and other inconveniences, but in the realm of teacher functioning they appear to be highly stressful.

Professional Stress

Professional stressors have recently become more significant (67). The teaching profession is in the midst of rapid change with new training requirements and increased job responsibilities becoming the norm (1). Extended teacher preparation programs, increased recertifi-

cation requirements, and more effective teacher evaluation plans are, for the most part, highly desirable. Yet they do bring demands that are often not supported by needed resources, thus creating high stress potential. In a sense, the maturation of teaching as a profession has also induced a crisis of identity in some teachers. If resources, training, and professional support are integrated as elements of this process, a healthy form of stress might evolve.

Interactional Stress

Certain stressors emerge from an individual's interpersonal relationships (67). For teachers, *interactional stress* occurs in two domains: personal relationships and job-related transactions (67). These domains often interact and influence each other's dynamics. It has also been noted that some people who are especially vulnerable to generic stress have difficulty dealing with any interpersonal relationships (48). In other cases, certain individuals are very effective in handling work relationships but inept in their personal lives. As Langer cautions, each individual creates and interprets relationships in unique ways (39). Teachers who have a positive self-image are less likely to have chronic interactional stress. In cases where social competence has been a major void, interactional stress is more likely (34). Further, as Johnson points out, chronic stress of an interpersonal nature can tear down the emotional constancy of even the most secure people (34).

Personal-Life Stress

Personal life event stressors that have an especially negative influence on teacher functioning are divorce, continuing marital discord, psychological depression, living with a serious family problem, financial disaster, children with severe disabilities or other chronic difficulties, birth of a new child, and major social context changes (25). Perlman and Duck note that while "intimate relationship traumas" do have immediate negative effects, most people regroup in terms of healthy functioning (49). For example, it would be *abnormal* for a teacher who had lost a spouse to continue with an effective teaching style. Interactional traumas must be provided for by allowing individuals adequate leave time to rebuild their world.

Daily interactions of a stressful nature can accumulate to become

destructive of the individual's integrity (27, 11). These are the minor stressors that people generally put aside as bothersome but insignificant, and posing no problems for them. Research shows, however, that these incidental yet daily issues can deplete an individual's resources for responding to the environment in productive ways (77). Mid-career teachers, for instance, often experience some form of "temporary burnout" because the incremental stress of ten or twenty years has eroded their usual responsiveness.

Ann Billings is a good example of how this incremental stress paradigm works. She has taught social studies to middle schoolers for eighteen years and has raised a family of four children. Usually a happy person and a very good teacher, her recent cynicism comes as a shock to her friends. Ann also is beginning to have physical problems that have no reality basis. Her physician explains to her that she is showing normal reactions to the small stressors of many years. "You're tired," he says, "and you need to begin doing more for Ann and work at rebuilding your positive attitude toward life."

Job-Related Stress

Compared with less intensive careers, teaching is high in *job-related stress* (1, 45). Three dimensions of this form of interactional stress are important: role stress, relationship stress, and context stress. A prominent stress affecting teachers is *role conflict and/or role ambiguity*. Not only are teachers expected to perform too many roles, but often the roles are intentionally left ambiguous. Further, some roles like discipline and nurturance of student self-concept can become laden with stress. Role stress has increased as the profession experiences a redefinition of career teacher roles. Differentiated staffing may help reduce this stressor in the future, but the immediate impact has been confusing to many teachers and school leaders. An increase in teacher participation in professional decision making with respect to role delineation will reduce this stressor considerably (29).

Relationship stressors inherent in teaching include interactions with students, other teachers, parents, supervisors, and citizens serving on school committees. Discipline and classroom control are a major source of interpersonal stress for teachers at all grade levels, especially for beginning practitioners (31). Regardless of the kinds of discipline problems confronted, the disruption of positive relationships produces stress reactions in teachers and students. Teachers may also experience personal conflicts with students—often due to

cultural differences. In addition, students with special learning problems can present stressful predicaments to teachers and parents alike. More recently, teachers have noted the following student behaviors as stress-inducing to the entire classroom ecology: excessive attention getting, passive/low involvement in classroom activities, and failure to complete assigned work (65).

Parent-teacher relationships also hold the potential for high stress. Areas cited in the literature as stressful include excessively high expectations (expecting the teacher to "improve the child"), conflicts over discipline strategies, lack of parental support for the learning process itself, and value conflicts over classroom-home relationships (14). Peer conflict with other teachers is yet another stress factor. Typical conflict areas include differences in philosophies, disputes over assignments, personality attributes, and misunderstandings about various personal and professional issues (37).

Supervisory conflicts may also cause stress (43). Differences concerning assignments, philosophy of teaching, management techniques, and academic expectations are issues that teachers most often cite as stressful. It should also be noted that many teachers are not bothered by their differences with supervisors or principals, but by the way in which these differences are handled (28, 41). In other words, productive leadership can reduce stress and promote professional growth by capitalizing on such issues as a means of staff sharing.

A final source of stress is the community. With such high expectations set for schools, teachers often experience much public criticism. For example, negative comments appearing in the media about low student test scores may imply that individual teachers are responsible for society's ills. No matter how illogical such reactions may be, they do produce stress (25).

Job-related stressors are usually acute and their primary effect is short-term. However, the recent research on small events accumulating to erode teacher integrity must be noted in any attempts to create more viable ecologies for teaching (77).

Stress Dynamics

Stress is a dynamic process that is engrained in the ecology and the interactional nature of teaching (29). The complexities of teacher

roles, the intensity of school environments, and the "subjective self" of each teacher contribute to the fluid and continuing mosaic of stress. An understanding of stress dynamics is essential to dealing with stress sources as well as with their impact on the teacher's professional and personal life (66).

As is the case in any system, the central unit of teacher stress is the individual. (A human system is comprised of the interactions of the individuals living or working in the same environment, such as a family or a classroom.) Each person induces, reacts to, and copes with stress in a unique manner. But all behaviors occur in some systematic form (39). The failure to recognize these two features of teacher stress (the role of the individual and the systems nature of behavior) will doom resolution efforts (65). The total behavior of each classroom makes a learning environment possible. All teachers have a purpose to their actions—such as teaching because of the satisfaction derived from working with young people, rather than for other rewards. Even when certain patterns of teacher behavior do not coincide with accepted practice, the action meets some individual purpose (39). For example, a constantly late-arriving teacher may be seeking some validation concerning a personal situation. Thus, an initial insight of stress dynamics is to know one's personal stress behavior patterns.

Another element of stress dynamics is the nature of the classroom and school environment. In a classroom, for example, students, teacher, textbooks, physical setting, time schedules, resources, interpersonal relationships, and other factors combine to form the boundaries of the teacher's immediate stress ecology (20). Simply reducing class size or adding a teacher aide may not resolve the stress because of the dynamics operating there. Consequently, a thorough study of the stress dynamics in the classroom is needed in order to understand the multiple sources of tension and growth.

At the school level yet another set of dynamics is operating. The principal may expect a particular teaching style that contrasts with an individual's philosophy. An individual may not yet be accepted into the school's social structure. Teachers may also experience conflict over role expectations, tensions from role overload, confusion about staff policies. And there may be staff tensions with respect to personal or professional issues, as well as problems related to leadership roles in the school (25).

System Interaction

A recent focus in stress research has been on the element of system interaction (5). This concept holds that whatever happens in one part of a system influences all the other parts. Further, it is thought that events in one system may well influence those in other related systems. *The concept of system interaction can provide a better understanding of the dynamics of teacher stress.* Consider just the classroom system in the following example:

John's parents are getting a divorce and his behavior becomes very disruptive of the entire class. His constant demands for attention influence other parts of the classroom system: the teacher has less time for instruction, the children are becoming more irritable as a result of this disequilibrium, and the once happy classroom is coping with several behavior problems. Thus, while the source of stress was John's behavior, it soon became multiple and influenced the other parts of the ecology.

Another example helps to illustrate how important it is for teachers to study the system interaction concept in their teaching and personal lives. In this case one system (the family) influences another system (the school).

Mrs. Albert teaches first grade. She believes in having the children do only about 20 minutes of homework a night. The parents of two children in the class believe otherwise, and instead of asking Mrs. Albert about her ideas, they consult the principal directly. Mrs. Albert is bothered not only by the parents wanting two hours of homework, but also by their approach to the problem.

These two examples help to illustrate how an event within a system can influence the stress orientation of the teacher. They also highlight the dynamics of human behavior that teachers must be cognizant of as they examine various stressors (65).

Teacher stress has multiple sources: the self, the various environments surrounding the teacher, and the interaction of teacher and events within different human systems. Stress is "essential" to teaching and learning; it can be a productive force when its sources are understood and managed in a positive manner.

The remainder of this monograph discusses ways for teachers to understand and manage stress in order to make it a positive influence in both their personal and professional lives.

INFLUENCES OF STRESS ON TEACHER FUNCTIONING

Positive Influences

Stress is usually identified with negative outcomes. As Swick and Hanley observe:

Typically, when people think of stressful situations they automatically conjure up images of deadlines to meet, unpleasant duties to perform, and uncomfortable situations to deal with. (67, p. 20)

Recent research and thinking, however, are emphasizing the positive aspect of stress (3, 17). *Stress can be a source of motivation (and direction) for both personal and professional growth.* A particular stressor (such as classroom management problems) may stimulate a teacher to take positive actions (enroll in a professional program on classroom management). This same process may be used in personal growth when teachers refine their time-management skills and/or realign their priorities in order to be productive (67).

The recent finding that teachers involved in professional growth experiences are usually more proactive in their teaching than their less involved peers suggests that positive uses of stress are taking place (61, 68). If used as a launching pad for new learning, stress *can sharpen teachers' problem-solving skills* (14). Swick and Hanley (67) delineate several positive outcomes of teacher stress management: improved self-concept, increased sense of self-efficacy, improvement in overall approach to problem solving, increased sense of stress sources, strengthening of teaching style, and an improved sense of well-being. Many teachers utilize stress as one means of refining their time-management skills. Others use challenging situations as a means of self-improvement (67).

Using stress in positive ways often increases interpersonal competence (39). Peers view teachers who can handle difficult situations as competent and as leaders. Supervisors also recognize the proactive teacher as more able to lead, to solve problems, and to provide guidance for peers. Improved relationships with students and parents usually emerge from this problem-solving orientation (48, 64).

Recognizing that stress can become a stimulus for growth, many school districts are sponsoring stress management programs for teachers.

Another potentially positive influence of stress is *the motivation it can provide for initiating teacher planning strategies*. A recent study of university teachers noted that self-imposed stress to improve classroom instruction was actually a positive event and it correlated with better teaching as assessed by students (22). The notion of teachers creating their own stress dynamics for positive reasons is receiving much attention. When stress is used as a means of improvement, *planning and organization* are necessary. The following is a good example of a teacher who imposed healthy stress on himself and used it to refine his instruction.

Mr. Williams has set a goal to update his teaching resources in social studies. He knows this will be an added challenge so he creates a time line and sets aside two times a month to work on this task.

With the proper orientation and the use of basic planning skills, many teachers "reframe" what might appear to be negative stress into opportunities for personal and professional development. Swick summarizes the major elements of this concept:

The key planner for positive learning arrangements is the teacher. . . . A teacher's personal-control orientation is critical in the design of any classroom program. . . . Teachers can strengthen their control skills by refining their educational skills, . . . strengthening their professional and personal support systems, and nurturing their self-concept. (65, pp. 37, 38)

Negative Influences

Certainly, stress can and does have negative influences on teacher functioning. A variety of stressors has been identified as possibly eroding the integrity of teachers. However, research also emphasizes that the individual's mental and physical status has much to do with the effects of stress (14). Each person, of course, has a level of stress beyond which he or she becomes dysfunctional.

Before identifying the negative effects of certain stressors on teachers, it may help to explain two points that can minimize these

effects. One important research finding about teacher behavior holds that in a *supportive environment*, teachers deal more effectively with stress (16). A hostile setting only increases the likelihood of negative reactions to even minor stressors. Another important research finding indicates that teachers can benefit from stress management courses (12). Knowledge and skill in setting personal and professional priorities can at least reduce the negative influence of stress.

Some of the major outcomes of stress that impact the individual's life include the following:

1. Increase in physiological problems such as high blood pressure and drastic changes in dietary habits
2. Disruption of psychological functioning that may be exhibited in chronic depression and/or excessive nervousness
3. Development of a personal sense of helplessness and feelings of inferiority
4. Significant loss of both physical and psychological energy
5. Development of psychosomatic illnesses that seem real but stem from the inability to deal with reality. (67)

Studies also indicate that, in some cases, these effects may be causal factors. For example, high blood pressure can bring on stress that normally would not be bothersome to a teacher. There is an interactive relationship between stress causes and effects. Similarly, there is an interactive relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of stressors on teacher behavior (8).

Stress can impede the individual's interpersonal relationships. Usually such effects occur when the individual's functioning has been greatly impaired or when the group involved is experiencing heavy stress due to working or related living conditions (2). Consider the following example:

John is extremely tired due to problems at home. He begins to exhibit negative attitudes toward his peers, who, in turn, become disenchanted with him.

Some of the major negative outcomes of such stress include a loss of control over human relationships that usually are productive, an increased sense of paranoia over little events that have no meaning,

the development of a "blaming" orientation that always sees others as the problem, a reduced effectiveness as a classroom manager, and a general increase in interpersonal difficulties (33).

Teacher burnout is a continuing problem. It emerges most when teachers are overloaded and have little control over their destinies (39). Conditions that promote burnout include excessive work schedules, lack of teaching resources, little allowance for teacher involvement in decision making, trauma or continuing problems in personal or professional life, and a lack of knowledge and skills for dealing with stress (18). Signals of burnout are identified as follows:

1. Consistent feelings of being overwhelmed
2. Continuing and severe problems with human relationships
3. Living in a constant state of high anxiety
4. Constant feelings of inadequacy and depression
5. Lack of involvement in pursuing personal growth
6. Continuing problems with health, especially psychosomatic illness
7. Constant negative feelings about self and others
8. Continuing energy loss, sleeplessness, and related symptoms of high anxiety.

MANAGING THE STRESS ECOLOGY

A major area of neglect in the preparation of teachers has been that of stress management skills (15, 25). As a result of research conducted during the past decade, training and educational programs are now being integrated into pre-service and in-service projects. The premise of these programs is that teachers can become managers of their stress environment. Swick describes three components of this stress management process: *assessment* of the stress ecology, *planning* a stress resolution/prevention scheme, and *implementing* the plan with the intent of continually refining it (65).

Assessing the "stress ecology" begins with self-assessment. Teachers who can assess their "selves" are more likely to deal effectively with stress than those who lack insight into their behavior (14, 17, 30). Self-assessment begins with recognizing one's feelings about life, teaching, students, and other items of significance. Swick and Hanley suggest that self-assessment should include at least the following areas: personal health status, interpersonal relationships, attitude toward teaching, relationships with students and parents, and professional growth (66, 67). The question teachers need to focus on is: Am I managing these areas of my life in a basically positive manner? Naturally, there will be areas of concern that can be isolated for inclusion in the planning phase.

The other aspect of assessment is an examination of the stress environment. The stress environment includes all the elements that comprise one's life-space—personal as well as professional events (59). Each teacher's identity is the result of these continuing, changing dynamics. Each aspect of the ecology is vitally linked to all the others. Any change in one part of the stress ecology influences all the other parts (14). Assessment can lead to the identification of particularly significant stressors, as in this example:

Mr. Ryne found that his community service schedule was so intense that his teaching suffered. By adjusting his schedule, he was able to reduce the stress on his teaching performance.

Identification of stressors or potentially difficult situations can become the basis of a *plan of action*. Research supports continuous planning as a positive force in preventing and resolving stress (19,

21, 45, 63). Needs can be categorized according to source of stress, impact of stress, potential for prevention or resolution of specific stressors, and type of stress (69, 77). An extension of this effort involves setting objectives that provide direction to the stress management process. Finally, the location of resources and the development of strategies to use in stress management is needed. Swick (65) provides several examples of planning strategies in *Student Stress: A Classroom Management System*.

The *implementation* of a stress management plan requires three elements: (1) a commitment by the teacher to make needed changes in behavior to achieve the goals of the plan, (2) a time line that specifies when events are to occur, and (3) a process for assessing the outcomes of the plan (39). Many people have good stress management plans but fail to carry them out because they never articulate a structure for making them happen. The chart that follows is an example of how to visualize such a structure.

Effective stress management, then, should evolve from individual teacher needs. This involves a continuing examination of one's environment and making plans to function effectively in that environment. Working together in peer study groups, teachers can plan to meet their common needs through the use of resources, seminars, and video conferences.

Stress Management Plan

Objective	Completion Date	Activity	Needed Resources	Location
To reduce commitments outside of school	November 1989	Assess current outside involvements and identify those that can be reduced	Professional materials on stress management, other teachers, and the use of a planning calendar	School and community
To increase my effectiveness in classroom management	Ongoing	Use NEA professional materials on discipline and classroom management,* share with other teachers, and assess my classroom management system	NEA kit on discipline,* colleagues, and classroom management planning guide	Classroom and school

*Discipline and Classroom Management: The NEA Training Program (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1985).

UNDERSTANDING STRESS MANAGEMENT

An understanding of stress management concepts and techniques is essential for today's teacher. According to research, a teacher's ability to recognize signals of high levels of stress is a key factor in dealing with stressors once they occur (17, 37, 60). Further, recent studies indicate that knowledge of stress management does influence teachers toward making positive uses of available resources (48, 67).

The primary objective of stress management is to assist teachers to focus on those stressors they can control and to learn effective ways of coping with them (62). Professional workshops on stress management usually focus on four goal areas: sharing concerns about common stressors, identifying sources of job-related stress, increasing individual self-confidence in dealing with stress, and developing stress prevention/resolution plans (2, 62, 66).

Various components of stress management can help teachers develop effective teaching behavior. Many of these components are based on the theory that stress, when dealt with positively, can become a meaningful part of the teaching/learning process. It is impossible (and probably undesirable) to eliminate all stressors; however, educators can teach themselves ways of reducing stress and redirecting it toward positive outcomes (12, 22, 61). For example, quiet periods of the day not only enable students to regroup, but can also help teachers reduce their own level of activity. Another strategy, the use of time management, can support teacher efforts to provide more balance in their work and in their personal lives.

Two aspects of time management deserve special emphasis: task completion and recognition of one's limits regarding stress. Good task orientation such as regular instructional planning reduces the potential for stress. While some unexpected events will always occur, planning minimizes the opportunity for stress to emerge (72). It is also important to realize that teachers can control only so many factors at once. In dealing with stressful events, they should focus on elements they can control (such as having teacher aides, parents, and student helpers assist with clerical and organizational tasks), and reframe areas they cannot change (69, 70). Reframing (a reorientation of one's perception) enables teachers to "see" a particular incident more productively (70).

ORGANIZING AND MANAGING THE ENVIRONMENT

Two of the most commonly cited causes of negative stress are environmentally related conditions within the workplace, and factors impeding the personal life (41, 45, 62). It is worth noting that these factors are also cited by teachers as causes of disruptive behavior among students. Consequently, if the physical and social environment of both the professional and personal spheres is properly organized, the costly fallout of stressors upon teachers and students can be minimized (10, 32).

One such environmental need is the classroom arrangement. It is important to establish a classroom setting with which teacher and students can identify and in which they can take pride. Teachers who have little or no "place" in the classroom or school that helps "identify" them as special will eventually be ineffective. (This premise also holds true for students.) The same practice should apply in their personal lives. The teacher who leaves school to enter a stress-ridden personal setting faces the exhaustion battle (4, 40, 60).

Another environmentally related element is the professional and personal atmosphere in which ones lives (40). A pleasant, challenging, and rewarding professional and personal context minimizes stress. Teachers and students respond negatively to stifling environments. An invitational teaching style, for example, elicits good feelings in all members of the school. Characteristics of well-organized and inviting environments include order, flexibility, teacher/student leadership, and other positive traits (51). Inviting classrooms display student work, provide chances for students to take care of the classroom, and have an attractive appearance. Stress increases when environments are disorderly, boring, and unclean (17, 37).

Even in well-organized settings, sources of stress can emerge and impede the teacher's functioning. A good management procedure is to periodically review possible stress sources and then try to reduce or eliminate them. For example, in some cases the daily schedule may be too full and need to be revised. Or, the teacher's personal life may include too many commitments that are bringing on stress. Many teachers suffer from an overload of demands in their personal

and professional lives. Effective time management can eliminate many aspects of this stress source (63).

While most people plan their work lives and even include some personal items in their planning, few teachers carry out continuous activities related to their personal renewal (4). The planning of personal enrichment and stress management experiences can preclude many stressors. Research clearly shows that individuals who are involved in creative outlets are more productive in problem-solving roles (25).

USING THE SCHOOL ECOLOGY

Langer's work (39) on the development of locus of control skills indicates that people who are involved in using their environment to strengthen themselves are more successful in resolving stress to their advantage. This is especially pertinent to the teaching profession. A starting point is for teachers to capitalize on their peers.

One of the most effective but most unused resources in handling stress is the teaching team. Stress management literature emphasizes the value of team development in confronting the demands of teaching (66, 68). Some of the benefits include sharing ideas for dealing with stress, using each other's strengths to reduce particular tensions, forming supportive relationships that enable team members to improve their self-concepts, developing teacher centers where materials and ideas can be shared, and establishing some common ground from which pride and integrity can emerge (66, 68).

Another resource for coping with stress is to capitalize on the talents and insights of school personnel, including teachers, supervisors, and specialized staff. Exchanging ideas with others on handling particular classroom stressors has proven effective both in preventing and reducing stress (16, 43). Regular communication with supervisory staff on instructional and management issues promotes a process for dealing with stressors when they do arise (36, 45). Two particular strategies that have proven useful are mentoring and arrangements such as the "buddy" system. These strategies help to engrain the sharing-support concept into the teaching process (58, 60).

Students, too, have much to offer teachers regarding stress management. Rewarding interactions with students can become a source of positive growth. Helping students solve problems can and should increase teacher confidence in dealing with stress. The following are additional sources of student growth that can and often do promote teacher self-confidence:

- Their success in learning
- Their expressions of gratitude for the teacher's help
- Their suggestions for improving the classroom
- Their sharing of their talents in the classroom
- Their growth in social skills and problem solving. (64)

In many cases teachers see the physical environment of the classroom and/or the school as stress-inducing. It may lack appeal, be too small in size, or poorly equipped for teaching students. According to recent observations, this need not be the case, however. A proactive approach to reorganizing and revitalizing the physical environment can resolve much of this stress. Teachers have used several techniques to improve the physical setting—for example, involving students in helping to keep the classroom clean, adding plants and other aesthetically appealing features, planning cleanup days, having parent volunteers paint and repair parts of the classroom, and obtaining funds from local businesses to better equip the classroom (51).

MANAGING PERSONAL LIFE

Teachers often cite overload as a major cause of negative stress. This overload occurs when the individual has accepted too many tasks for the time allowed to accomplish them. If left unchecked, the situation can lead to burnout. According to research, when teachers have established their priorities and organized their personal and professional lives, they function effectively—even under strenuous circumstances (2, 3, 55). Questions such as the following can help teachers plan and organize their personal/professional lives:

- Have you identified the important tasks that you want to accomplish? Have you prioritized them?
- Have you examined alternative ways to accomplish these objectives? Are you planning too many activities for the time you have to accomplish them?
- Have you organized a time schedule for accomplishing your objectives? If so, is the schedule a reasonable one for doing a good job?
- Have you established adequate resources to assist you in achieving your goal?
- How will you evaluate your effectiveness in accomplishing your priorities?

Good health also must be a part of the teacher's stress prevention program; it can reduce or eliminate many stressors. Recent research suggests that health is a major element in handling stress (5, 48). The maintenance of good health provides teachers with an energy source for spotting stressors and for dealing with daily small-event stressors (38, 77).

Health management strategies teachers cite as helpful include daily exercise, good nutrition, adequate rest, and the pursuit of personal interests on a regular basis. By maintaining good health behaviors teachers can avoid reliance on drugs or other artificial supports (17).

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL RENEWAL

Boredom, apathy, lack of interest, and malaise happen to teachers too. These stressors can be powerful, slowly eroding teacher functioning (4). They are not confined to mid-career professionals but can afflict any teacher who fails to pursue some form of professional growth. Indeed, research is clear on the need for continuous renewal of both personal and professional development (68). Particular career periods that seem prone to professional malaise are five to seven years after beginning teaching, twelve to fifteen years after beginning teaching, and the late-career time period (4, 23, 24). However, individual teachers must assess their status as professionals and determine areas of renewal that are important to them.

Some areas of stress that teachers have cited as very pertinent to professional renewal activities are classroom management problems, new ideas for teaching specific content areas, managing their professional life, and dealing with discipline problems (45). Additional benefits of professional growth experience can result from meeting other teachers, forming new professional attitudes, exploring new teaching roles, acquiring information on instruction, and increasing one's financial and social status (45). Moreover, professional renewal has been cited as a source of strengthening self-image as well as improving the teacher's position for dealing with problems in and out of the classroom (68).

To summarize, then, stress can be managed when teachers use strategies to identify, plan, and implement schemes to prevent/reduce/resolve stressors. When they take a proactive position, teachers use stress as a positive part of their personal and professional growth. In this sense, stress can be a force for improving their lives. Only when it becomes a chronic source of personal and/or professional erosion does stress become negative. Thus, the challenge for all teachers is to understand stress and take appropriate actions to grow from their stressful experiences.

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